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EUCROSS

Crossing borders making Europe

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The Europeanisation of Everyday Life: Cross-Border Practices and Transnational Identifications Among EU and Third-Country Citizens

Transnational mobility, attachment to the EU
and political participation in Europe

Fulya Apaydin vom Hau and Juan Díez Medrano

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Transnational Mobility, Attachment to the EU and Political Participation in Europe²⁴

Introduction

Are EU nationals more likely to cast a vote in general elections of their respective countries as opposed to European elections? Though extreme-right wing politicians in some EU member-states peddle Euro-skepticism in the hopes of claiming greater share of the votes in national elections, we know very little about the implications of citizens' supranational attachment on their decision to participate in national elections²⁵. This is important because decision-making processes on national political platforms have a notable impact on EU's bid to build an ever-closer union.

Existing studies on voting usually invoke domestic factors to explain why ordinary citizens go to the ballot box when they actually have little to gain in return. The list of usual suspects is long. Factors that increase the likelihood of participating in national elections include higher socio-economic status (Lijphart 1997), altruism (Fowler 2006), education (Gallego 2010), face-to-face mobilization (Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009), age (Jankowski and Strate 1995, Goerres 2007), marital status (Kingston and Finkel 1987; Solt 2008), national loyalty (Hirschman 1970) and family background (Plutzer 2002). Yet, these studies focus exclusively on domestic dynamics and assume that voter turnout in the general elections is primarily influenced by individual experiences in one's native context. However, increased cross-border mobility and supranational engagements adds a new dimension to these dynamics. Most notably, the emergence of a new group of Europeans with supranational attachments to the EU introduces new challenges to participation in general elections by way of anchoring additional political commitments beyond national borders.

Based on EUCROSS data, this paper finds a positive and robust relationship between attachment to the EU and decision to cast a vote at the national ballot box. This is an important finding with notable implications. Specifically, the study demonstrates how a sense of European attachment increases the likelihood of active political participation. On one hand, the findings suggest that factors beyond domestic dynamics may explain voter turnout and prompt ordinary citizens to rely on public platforms to induce change. On the other hand, excessive reliance on national political platforms may leave supranational platforms in the hands of extremist political parties, as the recent European parliament elections suggests.

Political attachments and national political participation in a supranational context

The European experience presents a complicated picture. Recent survey results reveal that member-country nationals exhibit a dual attachment to national and supranational entities. In fact, some citizens score equally high on national and supranational

²⁴ Fulya Apaydin vom Hau and Juan Diez Medrano.

²⁵ For declining level of public support for the EU based on a 2013 Eurobarometer survey, see <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/394854/Support-for-the-EU-plunges-to-all-time-low-across-Europe>.

attachment measures. Surely, European institutional arrangements accommodate and encourage the coexistence of dual attachments where supranational bodies work towards enhancing emotional ties between the member-country nationals and the EU, and actively support programs that incubate a shared European identity and commitment to European solidarity. Despite these efforts, the relationship between national and European attachments may not be entirely frictionless (Egeberg 1999) given possible clashes and contradictions between these two different types of commitments (Delanty 2003: 124). In that sense, the co-presence of dual attachments is curious, especially in a supranational context.

Political attachment

Political attachment is a deeply affective and voluntary connection to a political entity based on a sense of belonging/ identification (Dowding et.al. 2000) and is not simply limited to offering sheer political support. The intensity of attachment may be borne out of cultural, historical and social experiences that are not necessarily political in character. Together, these components give reasons to individuals for a voluntary commitment to an entity that is recognized as legitimate by its members (Delanty 2003: 125). In that sense, emotional attachments also constitute a basis to justify political passions.

Attachment to the EU and participation in elections

Political attachment to the EU is a manifestation of an emotional commitment to a supranational entity. Supranational attachments may discourage participation in national elections when it directly competes with citizens' national attachments. When this is not the case, European attachment may generate the opposite effect by encouraging citizens to influence national-decision making processes—at the very least through voting—because political decisions taken at the national level have a direct impact on the wellbeing, efficiency and survival of the EU.

A willingness to participate in national elections among EU champions may also explain why voter turnout in European parliamentary elections is steadily on the decline since 1979, despite respondents' favourable statements that endorse European ideals. Existing works that explain this lack of interest in European elections put the emphasis on the weakness of European identification and absence of emotional commitment, and argue that those who least identify with Europe are less likely to participate in European parliament elections (Studlar et al. 2003). These studies predict that citizens with such a profile are more likely to voice their political preferences on national platforms (Carey 2002). Others invoke cognitive mobilization hypothesis, suggesting that those who are more informed about European politics and exhibit a fundamental understanding of how decision-making processes work are likely to turn up at the European ballot box (Inglehart and Rabier 1978). This argument assumes that those who lack similar skills exhibit more parochial types of political engagement. In reality, however, this relationship may be more complex than it appears: member-state nationals who exhibit a strong attachment to the EU may not show up at the supranational ballot-box if national institutions are perceived to offer more powerful tools to influence decision-making processes in Brussels. Under these circumstances, a strong attachment to the EU may push citizens to voice their concerns on national political platforms.

Voting behaviour in a supranational setting

The data for this research was collected between June and October 2012 as a part of the EUCROSS project, and is based on 6000 phone interviews with randomly contacted German, Danish, Romanian, Italian, Spanish and UK nationals. The survey includes a wide range of questions that measure physical and virtual mobility practices, political participation, European identification, solidarity, cultural preferences, income, and occupation of the participants, and also provides information on the demographic background of the respondents. The dependent variable in the model is a binary variable and assesses national political participation. To measure this, the respondents were asked whether they voted in the last general elections in their country of residence. To analyse the impact of supranational attachment on national political participation, we asked the respondents how they would feel in the face of dissolution of the European Union.

New challenges

Unlike their counterparts in much of the rest of the world, EU nationals can freely relocate to live and work in a member state other than their own at a significantly lower cost. This opportunity to travel beyond national borders is further sponsored by EU-funded schemes. At the same time, increased transnational mobility of citizens pose new challenges to political participation at the national level especially when they move their residence to a different member-country.

Often, EU citizens cross borders in two ways: physical and virtual. In the first case, individuals move from one location to another by means of transportation. These activities require substantial investment and pre-planning. The experiences based on physical mobility also have a notable impact on how individuals add meaning to context and structure their emotional response. On the other hand, virtual cross-border activities include less costly and spontaneous activities such as online shopping, communication via web-based platforms, resource transfers and cultural consumption. These practices may influence the motivation to vote in distinct ways. For example, frequent physical cross-border engagement may push individuals to draw comparisons about economic and political circumstances at home and elsewhere and prompt them to take action by casting a vote in the ballot box. On the other hand, lesser frequency of these practices may breed political apathy especially at the supranational level, and push voters to either ignore or show limited interest in electoral participation.

In order to test the diverse impact of physical and virtual mobility practices, we explore their impact on voting behaviour separately. In doing so, we constructed an additive index for physical mobility, based on responses to the questions on experiences that involve actual border crossing.²⁶ Similarly, we constructed a virtual mobility index based on cross-border experiences that do not involve any form of physical moving across the national borders.²⁷

Socio-economic factors

Another factor that appears robustly associated with higher voter turnout is the level of income (Verba and Nie 1972, Brady et al. 1995). Since many respondents may not give accurate answers when directly asked about their income level, we used a different question that allows them to self-assess their economic wellbeing. Specifically, the respondents answered the question “Which of the following descriptions comes closest to how you feel about how well off your household is today?” based on the following five

²⁶ Values for this index range between 0 and 12. The index includes the following questions : Have you ever lived in another country for three or more consecutive months before you turned 18? (Yes=1, No=0); Please think about all your journeys abroad before you turned 18 (e.g. with your parents, other relatives, school or alone). How many countries did you visit before you turned 18? (None=0, One=1, Two=2, Three-Five=3, Six-Ten=4, More than ten=5) ; “ Have you lived in another country for three or more consecutive months since you turned 18? (Yes=1, No=0) ; Have you ever (e.g. as student or during your professional career) participated in an international exchange program that has been funded or co-funded by the European Union? (Yes=0, No=1); Please think of trips abroad which included at least one overnight stay. How many of these trips have you had in the past 24 months? (None=0, One=1, Two=2, Three-Five=3, Six-Ten=4, More than ten=5).

²⁷ Values for this index range between 0 and 30. The index includes the following questions: Please think about the last 12 months: How frequently did you talk to family members, in-laws and friends abroad by phone or using your computer? (Everyday=4, At least once a week=3, At least once a month=2, Less often=1, Never=0) ; How frequently did you communicate with them by mail or e-mail? (Everyday=4, At least once a week=3, At least once a month=2, Less often=1, Never=0) ; And how frequently via social networks? (e.g. Facebook, Hi5, Google+ etc) (Everyday=4, At least once a week=3, At least once a month=2, Less often=1, Never=0) ; Please think about all private and business related messages you received by e-mail and, if you use them, via social networking sites during the last 12 months. Approximately which percentage of them came from abroad (excluding spam and junk messages)? (1= "Between 0-25%" 2="Between 26-50%" 3="Between 51-75%" 4 ="Between 76-100%") In the last 12 months, have you in your spare time been active in any organization or group which is oriented towards other countries or cultures? (e.g. voluntary relief organizations, cultural associations, Salsa clubs etc.) (Yes=1, No=0) ; Do you ever send money abroad for reasons other than purchasing goods or services? (Yes=1, No=0) ; How Often ? (At least once a month=3, At least once a year=2, Less than once a year=1, None=0) ; In the last 12 months, have you received money from someone who is living in another country?-From partner (Yes=1, No=0), From close relatives (Yes=1, No=0), From other relatives (Yes=1, No=0), From other persons (Yes=1, No=0) ; Thinking about the last 12 months, have you purchased any goods or services from sellers or providers who were located abroad? That is, for example, via websites, mail, phone, etc. (Yes=1, No=0) ; And do you follow sports on an international level or in another country (e.g. watching matches of the German Bundesliga or the Formula-One world championship)? (Yes, at least once a week=3, Yes, at least once a month=2, Yes, but less often=1, No=0) ; How often do you watch TV content which is in another language and has not been dubbed, either directly on TV or via the Internet? (Every day=4, At least once a week=3, At least once a month=2, Less often=1, Never=0) ; In your work, how often did you interact with people (e.g. business partners, clients, colleagues) who are located in another country than [CoR] during the last 12 months? (Every day=4, At least once a week=3 At least once a month=2, Less often=1, Never=0).

options: (1) We find it very difficult; (2) We find it difficult; (3) We make ends meet; (4) We are living comfortably on the money we have; (5) We are living very comfortably on the money we have.

Relatedly, class backgrounds of the respondents are also documented as strong predictors of voting behavior. Some argue that parental education and income status leaves indelible marks on one's political orientation in later stages in life (Sandell and Plutzer 2005, Pacheco 2008), suggesting that these factors are positively correlated (Smets and van Ham 2013: 352). Therefore, the model controls for this by including three indicators on the family background of the respondent: education level of the mother, education level of the father and income status of the household when the respondent was 14 years old.

Another social factor that may influence voting behavior is marital status. Some argue that married couples are more likely to vote in national elections because they are more likely to endorse models of good citizenship and civic duty (Denver 2008; Smets and van Ham 2013). Others highlight practical barriers to political participation, such as having children, and suggest that marriage could have a negative effect on participating in national elections due to time limitations and family commitments (Solt 2008). The model accounts for these debates by controlling for marital status.

Age plays a notable role in predicting citizen participation in national elections. Existing studies suggest that older voters are more likely to show up at the ballot box while younger voters are habitually absent (Jankowski and Strate 1995; Goerres 2007). Others argue that as adults withdraw from social life due to old age, their likelihood to participate in elections also declines (Cutler and Bengtson 1974: 163). Under these circumstances, the relationship between age and voting may be curvilinear rather than linear (Smets and van Ham 2013). Therefore, we include age-squared into the model to control for this effect.

Finally, some scholars suggest that political participation is highly gendered, arguing that women are less likely to participate in political affairs due to cultural and economic limitations (Smets and van Ham 2013). The model controls for this by including gender as an additional variable.

Political orientation

The position of an individual on a left-right spectrum may also predict his/her voting behavior. According to this line of argument, those who are on the left end of the spectrum are more likely to participate in national elections while those who are on the right are less likely so. The model controls for this by including a variable that assesses the political orientation of the respondents based on their answer to the following question: "In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Which of the following positions best describes your political outlook? The categories are (1) Left; (2) Centre-left; (3) Centre; (4) Centre-right; (5) Right; (6) Left and right do not exist anymore.

Citizenship

Finally, citizens of some countries may be more likely to go to the ballot box than in others. This may be due to several factors such as formal rules that require citizens to

vote or a political culture that values participation in national elections. The model accounts for this by including five dummy variables for German, Italian, Romanian, Spanish and UK citizenship, keeping Danish citizenship as the base.

Results

European attachment and national political participation

The respondents in the sample exhibit a high level of supranational attachment with a mean of 2.40 (sd. 0.90) on a scale between 0 and 3, with 0 being least attached and 3 being most attached (See Figure 1). This suggests that the majority of EU nationals are emotionally passionate about the survival of the EU.

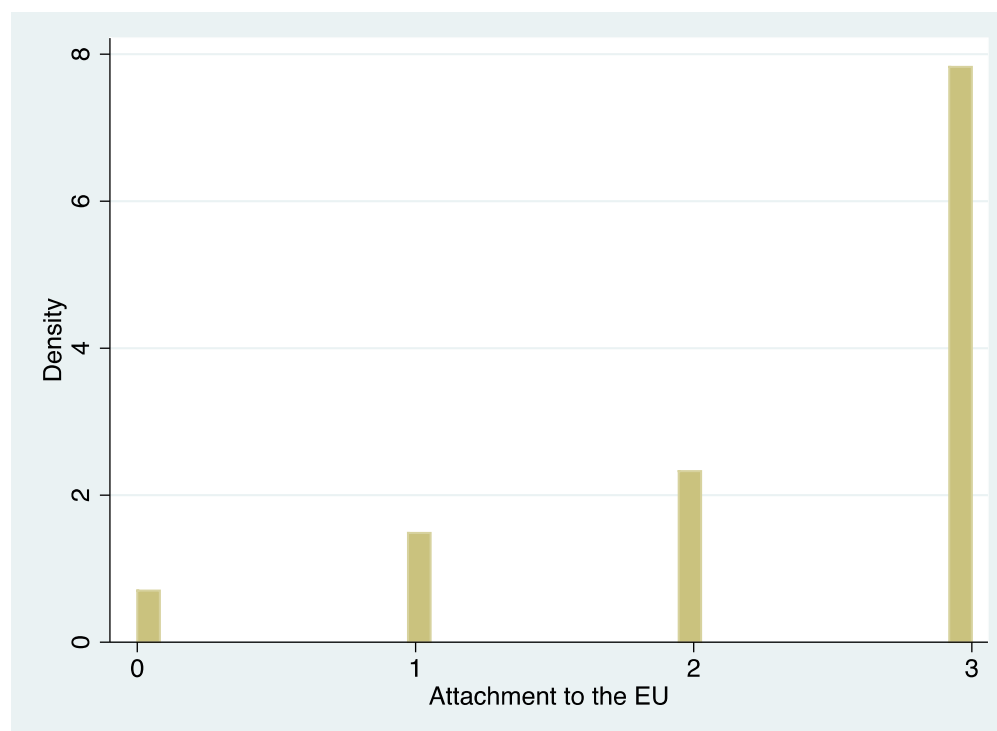


Figure 1 Distribution of attachment to the EU among the sample

The logistic regression results reveal that there is a positive relationship between European attachment and national political participation, and this is robust in the presence of different control variables. As Table 1 reveals below, the base model tests the impact of European attachment on voting in the national elections in the absence of control variables, and reveals that greater political attachment to the EU increases the probability of a member-country national to cast a vote in general elections. The relationship is positive and the coefficient is highly significant at $p \leq 0.01$. This coefficient remains highly significant in all models with theoretically relevant control variables. The direction of the relationship is positive in all tests, which reveals that supranational political attachments do not reduce the probability of participating in national elections. Among the EU member countries in the sample, German, Italian, Romanian, Spanish and British nationals are less likely to vote in national elections in comparison to the Danes, with the Romanians being least likely to go to the ballot box, followed by the British.

Table 1 Political participation and attachment to the EU (dependent variable: voting in national elections)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Attachment to the EU	0.216 *** (0.0372)	0.212 *** (0.0378)	0.175 *** (0.0422)	0.159 *** (0.0471)	0.170 *** (0.0593)	0.186 *** (0.0610)
Virtual mobility		-0.0327 *** (0.00748)	-0.0139 (0.00852)	-0.0209 ** (0.00919)	-0.0264 ** (0.0111)	-0.0152 (0.0116)
Physical mobility		0.0878 *** (0.0149)	0.0784 *** (0.0170)	0.0658 *** (0.0192)	0.0544 ** (0.0236)	0.0126 (0.0262)
Income			0.220 *** (0.0397)	0.289 *** (0.0450)	0.270 *** (0.0558)	0.228 *** (0.0578)
Education			0.329 *** (0.0502)	0.298 *** (0.0574)	0.351 *** (0.0699)	0.411 *** (0.0714)
Marital status			0.505 *** (0.0885)	0.466 *** (0.0979)	0.494 *** (0.122)	0.495 *** (0.124)
Gender			0.0349 (0.0808)	-0.00904 (0.0883)	-0.0209 (0.108)	0.0130 (0.109)
Age			0.137 *** (0.0137)	0.150 *** (0.0154)	0.153 *** (0.0187)	0.159 *** (0.0191)
Age2			-0.000958 *** (0.000134)	-0.00111 *** (0.000150)	-0.00111 *** (0.000182)	-0.00118 *** (0.000185)
Mother's education				0.0375 (0.0444)	0.0661 (0.0532)	0.0428 (0.0547)
Father's education				0.0238 (0.0415)	0.0222 (0.0493)	0.0262 (0.0499)
Household when 14				-0.0499 (0.0482)	-0.0191 (0.0598)	-0.0411 (0.0606)
Political orientation					0.0473 (0.0412)	0.0704* (0.0428)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
German						-0.770 *** (0.214)
Italian						-0.836 *** (0.223)
Romanian						-1.351 *** (0.232)
Spanish						-0.835 *** (0.220)
British						-1.072 *** (0.223)
Constant	1.256 *** (0.0922)	1.270 *** (0.103)	-4.648 *** (0.366)	-4.794 *** (0.447)	-4.984 *** (0.567)	-4.239 *** (0.597)
N	6,016	6,016	5,859	5,152	4,232	4,232

Logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

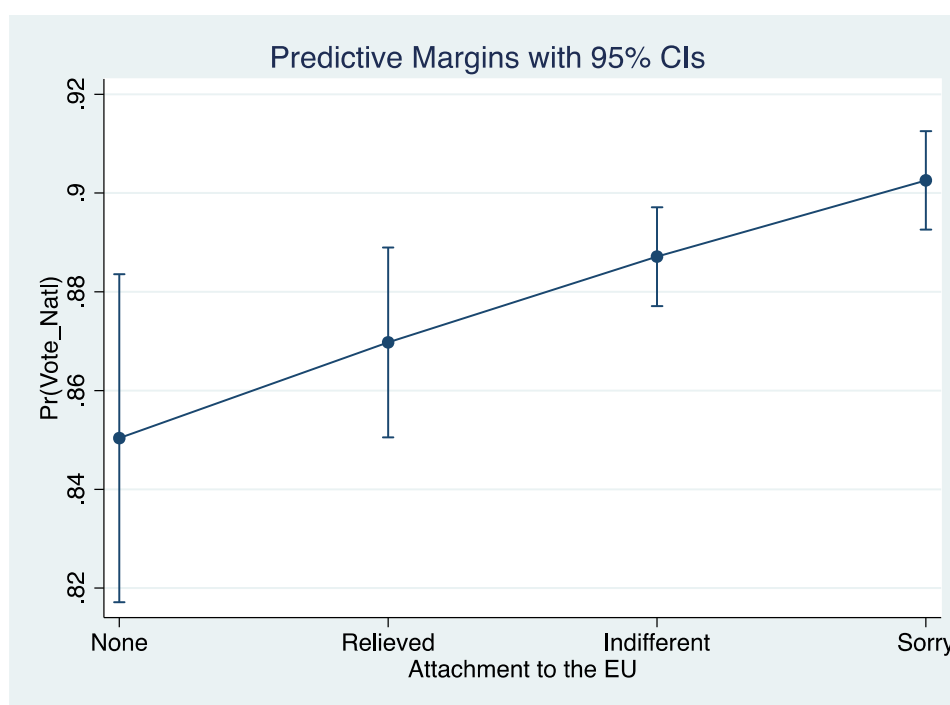


Figure 2 Predicted probabilities of voting in national elections for different levels of European attachment (based on Model 12)

The mean predicted probability of voting in national elections for someone who exhibits no European attachment is .85. This is quite high, probably because of the combined positive effects of socio-economic factors. Nevertheless, Figure 2 also shows that for one point increase in the level of attachment, the mean probability of voting in national elections increases steadily and reaches around 0.90 for member-nationals that score the highest. This suggests that greater emotional ties to the union increase the probability of voting in national elections, but the magnitude of this effect appears somewhat small.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, income appears as highly significant (at $p \leq 0.01$) and is positively correlated with voting in national elections in all models. This resonates well with the findings of earlier studies that predict a positive relationship between higher socio-economic status and political participation. Surprisingly, however, the family background plays no significant role. Neither the education level of the father nor the mother predicts the future voting behaviour of the respondent. Similarly, income level of the household when growing up has no significant relationship with the dependent variable.

Demographic factors present a curious pattern. Confirming earlier expectations, there is a decline in political participation rate as respondents get older: old age decreases the likelihood of voting in national elections for very senior citizens. Relatedly marital status appears to have a significant (at $p \leq 0.01$) and positive relationship with national political participation in all models. This observation is in line with arguments that associate marriage with a natural disposition to perform civic duties and goes against Solt's (2008) expectations otherwise. The results also reveal that gender plays no significant role in participating in national elections. Finally political orientation has a somewhat weaker influence on voting behaviour: individuals who place themselves on the right end of the spectrum are slightly more likely to vote.

Curiously, transnational mobility does not appear to be systematically associated with voting in national elections. While the relationship between physical mobility and voting is highly significant and positive in models 2, 3, 4 and 5—confirming earlier expectations—the introduction of citizenship eliminates the significance of this variable. Furthermore, virtual mobility practices have an even more interesting impact: the relationship between voting in national elections and virtual mobility is negative in models 2, 4 and 5. This suggests that virtual cross-border practices may decrease individual motivation to participate in politics. It must be noted that the significance of this relationship disappears with the introduction of citizenship in Model 6. Overall, the relationship between transnational mobility and national political participation seems less robust.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that there is a positive relationship between attachment to the EU and voting in national elections, which suggests a complementary rather than a mutually exclusive relationship between supranational and national attachments. Interestingly, however, greater mobility enjoyed by the EU member nationals has a less robust relationship with the propensity to vote in national elections. While virtual mobility decreases the chances of voting, physical mobility increases the likelihood of

national political participation. Moreover, the positive relationship between attachment to the EU and voting in national elections suggest that EU loyalists may see national elections as the primary means to initiate a change in European politics. Under these circumstances, citizens may not view participating in European elections as an effective means to instigate change. The shortcomings of European political institutions and democratic deficit due to lack of effective accountability arrangements may be one reason behind why citizens choose national platforms to voice their political preferences.

Relatedly, a point that calls for a more careful assessment is the relationship between declining trust in the EU, European attachments and voting in national elections. Since 2008, support for the EU institutions is on a steady decline and has spread beyond the well-known Euro-skeptics like the UK. However, this may not necessarily indicate a decline in the level of attachment to the EU. This is because lack of trust in the institutions does not eliminate political attachment at all costs: a citizen may have a very low level of trust in the government as a political institution, yet may still show willingness to participate in politics in order to induce change because of emotional connections. In that sense, while declining support for the EU institutions may be alarming for Brussels, this may not go hand-in-hand with a willingness to abandon supranational commitments.

On a final note, the diverse impact of citizenship on voting in national elections suggests reasons to have a closer look into how distinct configurations of national political institutions for interest aggregation, representation and political administration influence individual preferences to vote. While this paper exclusively focuses on individual-level variables, the precise effect of contextual variables—such as national culture, political institutions, economic well-being—needs a more careful consideration.

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